

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 3854

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, NU
SUBJECT: THE ARCHBISHOP AND POLITICAL TRENDS AMONG OPPOSITION
GROUPS

REF: MANAGUA 3644

1. NICARAGUAN SOCIOLOGIST HUMBERTO BELLI STOPPED BY EMBASSY'S COMMERCIAL SECTION ON AUGUST 16 FOLLOWING A ROUTINE VISIT TO AID FOR WHICH HE IS CONDUCTING SOCIOLOGICAL PROJECT. BELLI IS NOT PARTICULARLY WELL KNOWN TO THE COMMERCIAL SECTION, HAVING MET COMOFF ONLY BRIEFLY ON TWO PREVIOUS SOCIAL OCCASIONS.
2. BELLI IMMEDIATELY STARTED THE CONVERSATION BY STATING THAT HE AND ABOUT EIGHT OTHER INDIVIDUALS HAD ASSISTED ARCHBISHOP OBANDO Y BRAVO IN DRAFTING THERECENTLY-PUBLISHED LETTER KNOWN AS THE SACERDOTAL COUNCIL MESSAGE (SEE REFTEL). HE INDICATED THAT AMONG THE OTHER PERSONS WHO HAD HELPED THE ARCHBISHOP WERE FRANCISCO FIALLOS NAVARRO, A PROFESSOR AT UNIVERSIDAD DE CENTROAMERICA, AND PABLO ANTONIO CUADRA, DIRECTOR OF LA PRENSA.
3. BELLI SAID THAT THE ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE WAS MIS-INTERPRETED BY PRO-SOMOZA AND OPPOSITION FACTIONS ALIKE. THE ARCHBISHOP WAS NOT CALLING FOR SOMOZA'S RESIGNATION BUT ONLY MEANT THAT
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- RESIGNATION IS "ONE OF MANY ALTERNATIVES." BELLI IS CURRENTLY WRITING AN ARTICLE ANALYZING THE MISINTERPRETATION OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S PROPOSALS.
4. BELLI ALSO STATED THAT SOMOZA HAS BEEN PUSHED TOO FAR AGAINST THE WALL BY THE OPPOSITION, AND THIS PRESSURE PUTS HIM IN A POSITION OF NOT BEING ABLE TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO ANTI-GON

FORCES. THE OPPOSITION FORCES MUST DECREASE THE PRESSURE SOMEWHAT IN ORDER TO ALLOW SOMOZA TO MAKE NEEDED CHANGES. "THIS IS A MACHO SOCIETY," BELLI SAID, "AND THE PRESIDENT MUST BE ALLOWED TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES, OR RESIGN, WITH HONOR."

5. THE OPPOSITION IS VERY FRAGMENTED, BELLI CONTINUED, AND MANY ELEMENTS REFUSE TO DIALOGUE WITH SOMOZA. HOWEVER, "REASONABLE, MIDDLE OF THE ROAD" OPPOSITIONISTS BELIEVE THAT THE ARCHBISHOP'S PROPOSAL IS FEASIBLE. LOS DOCE ARE ALSO DIVIDED, HE INDICATED, WITH THE TWO PRIESTS (ESCOTO AND CARDENAL) BEING THE MOST "RADICAL AND REVOLUTIONARY" MEMBERS OF THAT GROUP.

6. WHEN QUERIED ABOUT THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE ARCHBISHOP, BELLI INDICATED THAT THE SAME GROUP THAT ASSISTED THE ARCHBISHOP IN HIS MESSAGE HAVE MET AGAIN TO AID HIM IN DRAFTING ANOTHER LETTER WHICH WOULD EXPAND UPON HIS ORIGINAL PROPOSAL OF COMPROMISE. THE ARCHBISHOP WILL CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE OPPOSITION GROUPS TO ATTEMPT TO DEFINE SPECIFIC PROGRAMS OR COURSES OF ACTION WHICH COULD BE PROPOSED TO SOMOZA. WHEN THE ARCHBISHOP HAS "FELT HIS WAY AROUND MORE" WITH THE OPPOSITION, HE MAY WISH TO DISCUSS ANY PROPOSALS WITH THE AMBASSADOR TO OBTAIN THE EMBASSY'S REACTION. COMATT REPLIED THAT THE EMBASSY WAS ALWAYS WILLING TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE ARCHBISHOP.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH BELLI GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE CASUALLY STOPPED BY THE EMBASSY, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH A SERIOUS CONFIDENTIAL

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DISCUSSION WOULD HAVE BEEN PROMPTED BY A SPUR-OF-THE MOMENT SOCIAL CALL. HE MAY HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO PERSONALLY "TEST THE WATERS" AS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A PRESENTATION OF SPECIFIC PROPOSALS TO THE AMBASSADOR.

8. HIS COMMENTS DO INDICATE THAT THE OPPOSITION REMAINS DIVIDED AND IS SEEMINGLY INCAPABLE OF PROGRESSING TOWARDS A UNITED FRONT. HIS COMMENTS ALSO INDICATE THAT THE ARCHBISHOP FEELS COMMITTED TO CLOSE PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE TO REACH A SOLUTION TO THE COUNTRY'S CURRENT POLITICAL PROBLEMS.

9. POL COMMENT: BELLI'S COMMENTS REFLECT THE POST CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OPPOSITION AND APPEAR, AT THIS MOMENT, TO BE OUT OF STEP WITH THE PREDOMINANT TREND OF THE OPPOSITION AS EVIDENCED BY RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN EMBOFFS AND OPPOSITION LEADERS.
SOLAUN

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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Message Attributes

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